

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

The 88th Academy Awards – Predictions & Miscellaneous Musings

Sophia Stein · Sunday, February 28th, 2016

The 88th Oscars®, hosted by Chris Rock, will be televised live by the [ABC Television Network](#) on [Sunday, February 28, at 7:00 pm ET, 4:00 pm PT](#), from the [Dolby Theatre®](#) at [Hollywood & Highland Center®](#) in Hollywood. The presentation will be televised live in more than 225 countries and territories worldwide.

For better or worse, here are my Oscar ballot predictions for the 88th Academy Awards —

Blue=My ballot choices.

Red=Based on all that I have read, heard, seen, and studied, this is the nominee that I believe will receive the trophy (where this differs from my selection).

Green=I cannot express a strong opinion in this category. Astute readers of Cultural Weekly, what's your take?

BEST PICTURE

[The Martian](#)

[The Revenant](#)

The Big Short

Bridge of Spies

Brooklyn

Mad Max: Fury Road

Room

Spotlight

Why all 8 Best Picture Nominees Are Winners:

The Big Short – An illustration of the corruption endemic at each and every level of the financial sector that triggered the economic meltdown of 2008, from which a majority of citizens have yet to fully recover. It forces the question: Have we learned from past mistakes and instituted sufficient reforms or will history soon repeat itself?

Bridge of Spies – A corrective for the xenophobia that threatens our national security. Tom Hanks plays a hero, a diplomat and a peacemaker for today. Spielberg at his sophisticated and nuanced best!

Brooklyn – A story that reminds us of who we are. In this time when immigrants are under assault by political aspirants, it's good to remember that even if we are not immigrants ourselves, most of us are descendants of those who arrived not so very long ago. The film inspires compassion and tolerance for new arrivals and appreciation for the courage and strength of those who risk that

journey.

Mad Max: Fury Road – a high octane, futuristic romp on acid.

The Martian – Matt Damon plays a hero for the 21st century — an indefatigable problem-solver with clear vision and balanced ego. The film has generated renewed excitement in, imagination about and commitment to the space program, apparent in the record number of astronaut applications — 18,300 applicants for 14 spaces — received by NASA at the end of 2015, for their 2030s anticipated mission to Mars.

The Revenant – A story of survival and revenge that keeps you relentlessly perched on the edge of your seat. Not for the weak of heart. Hollywood has always revered exquisite “visual storytelling” — which is why, I believe this film will take home the statuette.

Room – Given the dreadful to imagine premise – the captivity of a five year old boy and his mother (reminiscent of the Jaycee Lee Dugard kidnapping) — this film is thankfully not at all what you would expect! Life-affirming performances by Brie Larson and her young co-star, Jacob Tremblay are testament to the power of the imagination, and how love bolsters boundless resilience.

Spotlight – An insightful and meticulously constructed dramatization of why it took so long for news media to expose the endemic problem of pedophilia by priests in the Catholic Church. Stirring and masterfully told by an outstanding ensemble of A-list actors.

ACTOR IN A LEADING ROLE

Leonardo DiCaprio, *The Revenant* – long overdue, it is clearly Leo’s victory and his time

Bryan Cranston, *Trumbo*

Matt Damon, *The Martian*

Michael Fassbender, *Steve Jobs*

Eddie Redmayne, *The Danish Girl*

ACTRESS IN A LEADING ROLE

Saoirse Ronan, *Brooklyn* – the “it” factor, lovely and stirring to behold

Brie Larson, *Room* – a break-out performance, in a role that fits like a glove

Cate Blanchett, *Carol*

Jennifer Lawrence, *Joy*

Charlotte Rampling, *45 Years*

ACTOR IN A SUPPORTING ROLE

Sylvester Stallone, *Creed* – poignant, aged like a fine port, as Linklater uses time in his films, Ryan Coogler & Michael B. Jordan have presented Stallone with one hell of a gift horse. Let’s just hope that he remembers to thank them, this time out!

Christian Bale, *The Big Short* – Bale always takes the road less traveled with interesting choices

Tom Hardy, *The Revenant*

Mark Ruffalo, *Spotlight*

Mark Rylance, *Bridge of Spies* – original, a character unlike anything I have seen before, I am interested to see more from Rylance in the coming year

ACTRESS IN A SUPPORTING ROLE

Alicia Vikander, *The Danish Girl* – strength, vulnerability, and depth of feeling

Jennifer Jason Leigh, *The Hateful Eight*

Rooney Mara, *Carol*

Rachel McAdams, *Spotlight*

Kate Winslet, *Steve Jobs* – I am hoping that Winslet wins in 2016 for “The Dressmaker”!

DOCUMENTARY (FEATURE)

Amy – a haunting tribute to the Lady Day of our day and her irresistible siren song

Cartel Land

The Look of Silence
 What Happened, Miss Simone?
 Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom

ANIMATED FEATURE FILM

Anomalisa – poetic, builds to a heart-breaking, unexpected, ordinary, yet extraordinary climax

Inside Out

Boy and the World
 Shaun the Sheep Movie
 When Marnie Was There

FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM

Son of Saul – the most immersive and visceral Holocaust film experience that I have ever had, my heart was pounding out of my chest for the entire duration of the film. I felt enraged by the unshakable experience.

Embrace of the Serpent

Mustang

Theeb

A War

DIRECTING

The Revenant – Alejandro González Iñárritu

The Big Short – Adam McKay

Mad Max: Fury Road

Room – Lenny Abrahamson

Spotlight – Tom McCarthy

WRITING (ADAPTED SCREENPLAY)

The Big Short – makes something abstract comprehensible, formally inventive, particularly in its use of direct address

Brooklyn

Carol

The Martian

Room

WRITING (ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY)

Spotlight – beautifully constructed

Bridge of Spies

Ex Machina

Inside Out

Straight Outta Compton

CINEMATOGRAPHY

The Revenant – the opening sequence is jaw-dropping, nature captured in all her power and glory (stampeding buffalos, the avalanche)

Carol

The Hateful Eight

Mad Max: Fury Road

Sicario

PRODUCTION DESIGN

Mad Max: Fury Road

Bridge of Spies

The Danish Girl

The Martian

The Revenant

COSTUME DESIGN

[The Danish Girl – craftsmanship and beauty, period](#)

[Mad Max: Fury Road](#)

Carol

Cinderella

The Revenant

MAKEUP AND HAIRSTYLING

[Mad Max: Fury Road](#)

The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed out the Window and Disappeared

The Revenant

SOUND EDITING

[Mad Max: Fury Road](#)

The Martian

The Revenant

Sicario

Star Wars: The Force Awakens

SOUND MIXING

[Mad Max: Fury Road](#)

Bridge of Spies

The Martian

The Revenant

Star Wars: The Force Awakens

FILM EDITING

[Mad Max: Fury Road](#)

[The Big Short](#)

The Revenant

Spotlight

Star Wars: The Force Awakens

MUSIC (ORIGINAL SCORE)

[Star Wars: The Force Awakens – iconic! and nostalgic!](#)

Bridge of Spies

Carol

The Hateful Eight

Sicario

MUSIC (ORIGINAL SONG) – Have a listen here.

[“Earned It,” Fifty Shades of Grey – The Weeknd, Ahmad Balshe, Jason Daheala Quenneville and Stephan Moccio](#)

[“Manta Ray,” Racing Extinction – J. Ralph and Antony Hegarty](#)

[“Simple Song #3,” Youth – David Lang](#)

[“Til It Happens To You,” The Hunting Ground – Diane Warren and Lady Gaga](#)

[“Writing’s On The Wall,” Spectre – Sam Smith and Jimmy Napes](#)

VISUAL EFFECTS

[The Martian – integrating actual NASA images of the red planet, it may be the closest that any of us in our lifetimes comes to making a trip to Mars! \(The Martian VR Experience is pretty far out, as well.\)](#)

[The Revenant – that gruesome attack of the bear may take the prize?](#)

Ex Machina

Mad Max: Fury Road

Star Wars: The Force Awakens

SHORT FILM (LIVE ACTION)

Ave Maria

Day One

Everything Will Be Okay (Alles Wird Gut)

Shok

Stutterer

DOCUMENTARY (SHORT SUBJECT)

Body Team 12

Chau, beyond the Lines

Claude Lanzmann: Spectres of the Shoah

A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness

Last Day of Freedom

SHORT FILM (ANIMATED)

World of Tomorrow – playfully thought-provoking

Bear Story

Prologue

Sanjay's Super Team

We Can't Live without Cosmos

#OscarsSoWhite

For the second year in a row, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has nominated only white actors in its top categories and failed to recognize any black directors. In response, Spike Lee, Jada Pinkett Smith, and Will Smith are boycotting the show.

It is significant to note that in the 88 year history of the Academy Awards, a total of 17 black artists total have won an Oscar. To date, no black filmmaker has won the top directing prize for narrative feature.

We have faith that Chris Rock will infuse some much needed perspective — along with some shaming into the star-studded affair. The time is nigh.

Meanwhile, if you have not already done so, please do yourself a favor and get out and see these four films from supreme artists, who happen to be of color.

Creed – Director Ryan Coogler and Actor Michael B. Jordan cooking with fire. A brilliant concept for a fresh take on a tent-pole, franchise classic.

Straight Outta Compton – Director F. Gary Gary, Hip Hop 101 — a must see! With a killer score. Discover how and why it became the highest-grossing music biopic in history.

Dope – Director Rick Famuyiwa's coming of age film is heartfelt, hilarious, outrageous, and smart. Dope is dope.

Beasts of No Nation – Abraham Attah was named Best Male Lead and Idris Elba won Best Supporting Actor at 2016 Spirit Awards last night. Congratulations Abraham and Idris!

Chi-raq – A modern day adaptation of the ancient Greek play Lysistrata by Aristophanes, set against the backdrop of gang violence in Chicago from none other than Spike Lee, the artist himself.

The magnitude of the issue:

The staggering numbers that prove Hollywood has a serious race problem, The Washington Post

Some forms of redress:

I absolutely love ...

10 Actors, Directors, and Executives Can Reverse #OscarsSoWhite

Courtney Kemp Agboh, Showrunner & Executive Producer

Steven Caple Jr., Director & Screenwriter

Danai Gurira, Actress & Playwright

Corey Hawkins, Actor

Charles King, Founder & CEO, MACRO Ventures

Nneka Onuorah, Documentary Filmmaker

Alana Mayo, VP of Production, Paramount Pictures

Nate Parker, Actor, Screenwriter & Director

Issa Rae, Actress, Screenwriter & Digital Studio Head

Lena Waithe, Actress, Producer & Screenwriter

10 Black Filmmakers Who Deserve More Respect, Complex.com

Oscar Micheaux

Melvin Van Peebles

Gordon Parks

Ousmane Sembéne

Ernest Dickerson

F. Gary Gray

Steve McQueen

Kasi Lemmons

Dee Rees

Richard Ayoade

In the words of Academy member Jennifer Warren, director, actress and founding member of the Alliance of Women Directors (The Washington Post, Thursday, February 25):

“The heart of the problem isn’t who gets nominated. The heart of the problem is how the industry works. The academy is a microcosm of the industry, and it shows benign neglect more than outright prejudice. It’s not that the industry is prejudiced. It’s that they’re disinterested in anything but themselves.”

On A Much Lighter Note:

Some Interesting Tidbits for Your Oscar Viewing Parties

Number of Features Eligible for Best Picture this Year (88th Oscars, 2015): 305

Number of Countries Submitting Foreign Language Films: 80

Number of Voting Members of the Academy: 6,261 (as of 12/14/15)

Estimated Number of Americans Who Watched the 87th Oscar telecast: 37.3 million

Number of Award Categories for the 88th Oscars: 24

Height of Oscar: 13.5 inches

Weight of Oscar: 8.5 pounds

Design: a stylized figure of a knight holding a crusader’s sword, standing on a reel of film, with five spokes, signifying the five original branches of the Academy (actors, directors, producers, technicians, and writers)

Designer: Cedric Gibbons, chief art director at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Sculptor: Los Angeles artist George Stanley

Manufacturer of the “New Statuettes”: Polich Tallix — starting with the 88th Academy Awards®, Polich Tallix Fine Art Foundry, Rock Tavern, New York, will exclusively create its iconic Oscar® statuettes in a process that returns to the Oscar’s fine art roots, the statuettes will now be hand-cast in bronze before receiving its 24-karat gold finish.

Manufacturing Time: 3 months for 50 Oscar statuettes

Person Who Has Hosted the Most Oscar Shows: Bob Hope, 19 host appearances

Longest Oscar telecast: 4 hours, 23 minutes (2002)*

Shortest Oscar telecast: 1 hour, 40 minutes (1959)

** New Policy on Acceptance Speeches: Nominees were asked to submit their “thank you” lists of names in advance of the awards ceremony; scrolling list of these names will be showcased at the bottom of the screen during the winners’ time on stage.*

And Best for Last:

SOPHIA STEIN – 15 TOP FILMS OF 2015

99 Homes

Amy

Anomalisa

Bridge of Spies

Brooklyn

Dark Horse

Diary of a Teenage Girl

Dope

The Dressmaker

Margarita, With A Straw

The Martian

Spotlight (“The Club” from director Pablo Larraín provides a great counterpoint)

Tangerine

The Lobster

The Wolfpack

Top Image: Chris Rock, host of the 88th Annual Academy Awards

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